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DE RUEHIN #2895/01 2340824
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 220824Z AUG 06
FM AIT TAIPEI
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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S POLITICAL SITUATION, ASEAN
MEETING

¶1. Summary: As the multiple efforts to oust President Chen Shui-bian and investigations into the Presidential Office's special state affairs expense account stayed in the Taiwan media's spotlight August 22, news coverage also focused on President Chen's planned trip to Palau in early September, and cross-Straits interactions. The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" ran a banner headline on page three that read "Shock Wave of [Efforts] to Oust Bian, Stock Market Plunges 215 Points." In terms of cross-Straits interaction, the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest daily, ran a banner headline on page four that said "In Terms of Chen Yunlin's Planned Visit to the Island, Taiwan Calls on Officials of Both Sides to Negotiate First."

¶2. Most Chinese papers editorialized on the campaign to unseat President Chen, discussing the roles of scholars and lawyers in the campaign, and the Assembly and Parade Law. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" said one of the reasons that Chen will not step down easily is because he still has the support of the United States. An editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times," however, criticized former DPP Chairman Shih Ming-teh's method of unseating the president, saying that democratic values and the rule of law should be placed above and beyond the issue of protecting or keeping the president. In terms of the ASEAN meeting, an editorial in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said the inclusion of the "China factor" within the ASEAN arena, combined with the policy of exclusion directed against the U.S. and Japan, will "inevitably upset ASEAN's political equilibrium and revive the historical nightmare of a hegemonic China." End summary.

¶3. Taiwan's Political Situation

A) "Waiting for Legal Action"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] (8/22):

"... Chen survived a legislative motion initiated by the opposition in June to recall him, but pressure for him to resign has gained new strength. However, many observers say prospects of bringing Chen down are slim. Under the Constitution, the president is immune to punishment for criminal offenses. To be in office for another one and a half years, he has better resources to protect himself and his family; to quit now is to give up all. Another reason is that he still has the support of the U.S., Taiwan's mentor and protector. Stephen Young, de facto U.S. ambassador in Taipei, has publicly remarked that unless evidence showed Chen was involved in the scandals, he should remain in office to maintain stability.

"On the other hand, should the number of people taking to the streets to support Shih's sit-in prove overwhelming and if the protest is prolonged, threatening the stability of Taiwan, the U.S. has to stop supporting him. Then, he'll have to go. In short, Washington, just like Taiwan's general public, is waiting for the prosecution to take action against Chen. Before that, the chief of state is innocent of any wrongdoing. The president's involvement in the 'invoice-gate' case is indisputable. How long can the U.S. or Taiwan's prosecutors further delay actions against an obvious offender against the law?"

B) "The Rule of Law Must Come First"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (8/22):

"Taiwan's opposition parties and interest groups are continuing to call on President Chen Shui-bian to step down. There is no evidence to support the view that the president has violated the law. We should respect freedom of expression and the right of everyone to air an opinion. But the actions and confrontational rhetoric of those seeking Chen's resignation and those who want to protect him are approaching rock-bottom. If these groups don't exercise restraint, the nation may face a period of pronounced difficulty in which democracy and the rule of law are sacrificed. ..."

"Shih's cause to unseat the president through instigating a popular uprising is wrong-headed. Taiwan is a democracy that has clear legal requirements and procedures regulating the removal of a president. The pan-blue camp's legislative recall motion failed and Chen retains the legal right to govern. Organizing street protests is not a good tactic, because if the president is forced to step down as a result, it will set a bad precedent for this nation's democracy. ... Both sides grappling with this issue have strong arguments and public support, and neither side can easily defeat the other. The goal of adhering to democratic values and the rule of

law should be placed above and beyond the issue of protecting or unseating the president. ..."

¶4. ASEAN Meeting

"A New Path Needed in Asian Regionalism"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (8/22):

"... ASEAN has focused on inviting Japan, South Korea and the People's Republic of China, but not the Untied States, into the ASEAN sphere, a trend that has sparked the monikers 'ASEAN+1,' 'ASEAN+3' or 'East Asian Community' in ASEAN international conferences or forums. ... Accompanied by new notions of regional cooperative framework, as well as the rise of China, the growing consciousness of new Asian regionalism itself has emerged from complex factors. On one hand, the sense of new Asian regionalism signifies the increasing needs for regional cooperative arrangements in the ASEAN with external powers, but also reflects long-standing resentment in ASEAN toward both 'hegemonic' pressure from the U.S. and other Western powers as well as Japan and widespread ambivalence toward the rise of China. ..."

"If ASEAN-based regional cooperative frameworks are to function effectively, PRC involvement and inclusion is ultimately inevitable. However, the direct inclusion of the 'China factor' within the ASEAN arena, combined with the policy of exclusion directed against the U.S. and Japan, will equally inevitably upset ASEAN's political equilibrium and revive the historical nightmare of a hegemonic China. Simultaneously, evidently strong desire in Washington and Tokyo to return to the arena of ASEAN international affairs has also made the atmosphere complicated and sensitive."

"There is also the question of how ASEAN will deal with Taiwan, which remains a very important partner for the ASEAN countries in economic, social, cultural and even security spheres. ... In short, in the face of China's ruthless pressure, Taiwan has no feasible choice but to be a good global citizen and an advocate of 'democracy and peace' instead of either engaging in a 'bad guy' form of

brinkmanship or adopting a self-defeating and denigrating stance of 'peace,' with or without justice or democracy, 'at any price,' as advocated by the opposition Kuomintang. As long as our existence and values have been deeply incorporated into the regional or global system, Taiwan need not fear being arbitrarily abandoned or sacrificed."

YOUNG